



**Testimony**  
**Elizabeth Gara, Executive Director**  
**Connecticut Water Works Association**  
**Before the**  
**Planning & Development Committee**  
**February 27, 2015**

The Connecticut Water Works Association (CWWA), a trade association of municipal, regional and private water utilities, opposes **SB-461 - AN ACT PROHIBITING THE ASSIGNMENT OF CERTAIN MUNICIPAL LIENS.**

This bill would hinder the collection of delinquent water bills by prohibiting municipalities from assigning liens for unpaid water charges unless the amount due is more than \$2500.00.

Municipal water departments rely on revenues generated from effective debt collection practices. If water bills remain unpaid, a town may lien a property for unpaid water/sewer bills and exercise its right to foreclose the lien in order to collect the debts. Towns provide delinquent customers with appropriate notice and due process rights and will work with them to develop payment plans.

Liens are an effective tool in facilitating the collection of overdue bills. Some towns, however, assign liens rather than pursue foreclosure. Lien assignees may offer longer payment arrangements to assist customers in paying off their debts. In situations where a property owner is delinquent on water or sewer charges along with property taxes, the \$2500.00 cap may preclude the delinquent water and sewer bill from being assigned along with the property tax lien, making it unlikely that the water or sewer department will be able to collect these debts.

Typically, the amount of unpaid water charges is not fixed in the lien because additional monthly or quarterly service charges and applicable interest charges continue to accrue. Given that a typical residential water bill is only a few hundred dollars per year, by restricting the assignment of the lien until the bill exceeds \$2500.00, a residential customer could go two or three years before the town could assign the lien.

SB-461 would undermine the ability of towns to appropriately collect unpaid water charges. Allowing debts to remain uncollected is unfair to customers who do pay their bills in a timely manner.

*The Connecticut Water Works Association, Inc. (CWWA) is an association of municipal, private and regional water utilities serving more than 500,000 customers, or population of about 2½ million people, located throughout Connecticut.*

Senator Osten, Representative Miller and Members of the Planning and Development Committee,

My name is Bill Anderson, and I'm the owner of Blackledge Country Club in Hebron which is a 36 hole Facility. As an owner of a golf course, I have been dealing with this taxation issue for almost 30 years now. As you may be aware, the golf course industry has taken a significant downturn since 2002. Currently, it has leveled off but there is no sign of returning to the glory days of the 90's. The issue of taxation of golf courses, is one that can swing on the whims of the town assessor or the selectmen of each individual town. In my case, I had an assessor that did not look at the golf courses as a benefit to the town as open space, yet as a cash cow for the Town of Hebron to take advantage of. This assessor has now retired, but had caused me from 1994-2006 to file lawsuits against the Town and do battle every revaluation year. Quite frankly, it was exhausting, and financial draining on a business that has been in my family for over 50 years. During those years there were many times I thought about developing my property, which is 310 acres, and moving on to a different industry, but I couldn't do it. I have 2 sons who have graduated from UMASS in the Turfgrass Management program, and are now my partners and wanted to be able to pass the business on to them and their children. In 2001 we were assessed at \$300,000 per hole for improvements, after a lengthy court battle in 2006, we brought that down to \$175,000 per hole for improvements and in our most recent valuation (thanks to the retirement of the old assessor) we are currently at \$75,000 per hole. All the while courses in some neighboring towns were being assessed at a far lower rate, at the whims of their assessors.

Currently, a fellow golf course owner, Michael McDermott, who owns courses in the Towns of Hebron (Tallwood C.C.) and Coventry (Twin Hills C.C.), is battling the Coventry assessment because it is significantly higher than the Town of Hebron's. In fact, the facilities and conditions at Twin Hills are inferior to the ones at Tallwood, and yet while they are only 10 miles apart, they are being taxed at two significantly different rates! Something must be done to standardize the assessment of golf courses, and to promote fair competition in this industry. Already all privately owned golf courses compete against municipally owned courses who pay no taxes at all! How can this be fair? Something must be done to level the playing field.

Without the adoption of a bill which standardizes assessments for all towns, how can I be sure I will be assessed fairly come our next revaluation? If not, will I be forced to again consider selling my property for development?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Raised Bill #970, **An Act Concerning the Taxation of All Public and Private Golf Courses.**

Sincerely,

William E. Anderson.Owner  
Blackledge Country Club